

The changing face of agricultural ed.

GOING against the grain — not to mention the hoof and the wool — of a withering rural sector is news that more city children than ever are enrolling in WA's agricultural colleges.

Julian Kreig, state coordinator of agricultural education, emphasises this is no mere spin-off of the greeny movement. The reasons are far more pragmatic.

Few of the city-based kids will be taking up farming. "They are there to learn practical skills such as butchering or farm vehicle mechanics," Julian says. "However, there has been some green influence. Many now say they want a job caring for the land, such as being a park ranger.

"But, on the whole, they are looking for a good, practical alternative to university, one that could lead to a job in a trade or industry.

"Some will eventually practise their trade in country areas but there won't be enough to say we are witnessing the start of a rural revival."

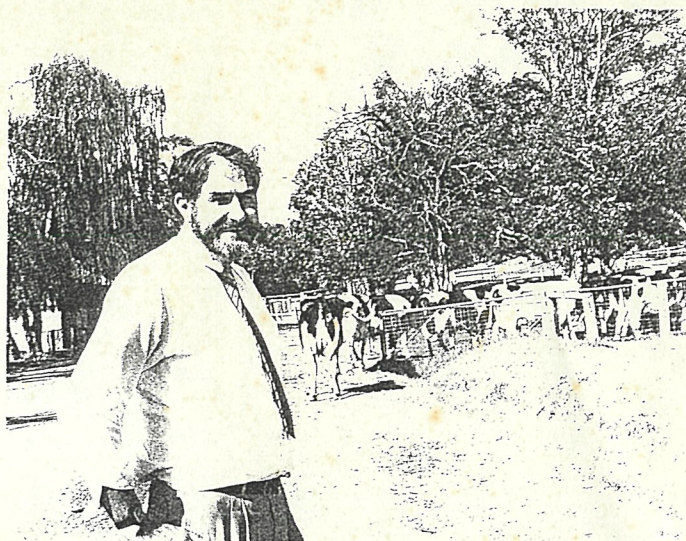
The number of city students at the Year 11 and 12 colleges may have risen to some 30 per cent of intake but the number of country ones has fallen.

"At one stage we didn't think we would fill the colleges this year because of the rural downturn. Remaining families in the bush are as keen as ever to educate their children. There just aren't the number of country kids around now," Julian explains.

He believes the swing to agricultural education by kids from the suburbs means there is a need to change the curriculum to meet an increased demand for higher — but not tertiary entrance — qualifications.

"The colleges come to a dead end at Year 12. We're looking at courses that will allow students to do post-Year 12 study without having first to get their TEE.

"The courses could take them to Muresk (the state's tertiary agricultural college, off-shoot of Curtin Univer-



ABOVE: Julian Kreig, state coordinator

sity) to get higher agricultural qualifications, or could lead to an associate diploma through TAFE," he says.

Muresk has said it will accept suitable agricultural college students and there is a pilot Year 12 certificate course underway between Cunderdin Agricultural College and the local TAFE.

Further indication of Ministry enthusiasm for expanding rural-based skills is the recent appointment of **Steve Kitching** as an agricultural curriculum consultant.

Not all the 400 students at WA's six agricultural colleges will want to take up the option of going on beyond year 12. Whether they do or not, simply being at the residential colleges gives them extra skills, Julian says.

"They develop close bonding. They learn growing-up skills similar to those taught in the Army. These skills will prove valuable in later life."

The spotlight on agricultural colleges as worthy alternatives to universities underlines WA's vanguard position in the changing emphasis of Australian education.

The federal Minister for Higher Education has made it clear the government wants to turn round a culture that encourages students to think of careers in trades and manufacturing as "inferior options".

Cunderdin Agricultural College is part of the WA Education Ministry's innovative Pathways project. The pilot program of job-oriented subjects — pathways — weaves TAFE options into the upper secondary school curriculum.

Successful completion of a pathway will be the equivalent of completing a TAFE certificate-level course. Primary industry and natural resource management is one of the eight pathways.

EQUITY



GIRLS are being painted into the agricultural education picture stronger than ever. Latest recognition of their importance is a new residential hostel opened at Harvey Agricultural SHS. The converted housemaster's residence can sleep nine girls who, until this year, would have had to find rooms in town some 2km away. Early morning duties entailed costly taxi rides to the predominantly dairy and fruit farm. They often missed out on working socials such as weekend school visits to agricultural shows. School principal **George Wittorff** said: "Until recently agricultural education was a male domain in WA — for no good reason. We took our first girl students in 1987 and last year one of them was dux of the agricultural wing."